

It has been nearly four years since May 2003 when President Bush stood under a banner on the USS Abraham Lincoln that proclaimed "Mission Accomplished," and yet American casualties tragically continue in Iraq. Over three thousand Americans have died there, and over 23,000 have been injured, with many of those wounds being permanent.

As the problems at Walter Reed Army Medical Center have recently brought to light, injured soldiers returning home are funneled into a Veterans Administration (VA) health care system in crisis. That system is being overwhelmed by troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan seeking care, and, in many cases, is unable to provide the prompt, quality medical care they deserve. The VA service-deficit numbers that we even know about are eye-opening: The Administration has a 400,000-case backlog of benefit claims filed during FY 2006 or later! On average, those veterans will likely have to wait six months to two years before ever receiving benefits.

Even as the military's disability caseload has increased (the Army's is up 80% since 2001), the President's FY 2008 budget proposal cuts spending for several programs that support the men and women who are fighting and/or who have fought for our country.

Examples of these cuts include:

- For the fifth year in a row, the President's proposed budget raises health care costs for 1.3 million veterans - this time by assuming \$4.9 billion in increased co-payments on prescription drugs and new enrollment fees over ten years.
- The President's budget proposes overall cuts in military health care totaling \$2 billion in FY 2008 and \$14 billion over five years.
- The President's budget submission particularly shortchanges veterans' health care funding levels after FY 2008. More returning wounded troops in the "out years" would swamp an already underfunded VA system.
- The President's budget cuts medical and prosthetic research by \$2.7 million. This could set grant research back by years, just as many troops are coming home with injuries that require extra expertise and technology.
- The President's proposed budget also eliminates an important health program for traumatic brain injuries - at a time when over 1,500 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have suffered brain injuries from IEDs.

Supporting our troops clearly requires much more than patriotic verbiage. It requires providing enough funding to meet the needs of our soldiers returning from war right now and also a longer-term fiscal commitment to shape a health care infrastructure adequate to meet the needs of the 700,000 veterans who will enter the VA system in the coming years.

To this end, I am supporting legislation in the House to prohibit the Department of Defense from increasing medical and dental health care coverage fees for retired military personnel; to establish a new patient accountability system within the VA hospital network; and to increase, by \$3.4 billion, the immediate funding available for medical assistance to military personnel and returning war veterans.

Please be reassured that I will continue to support meeting our health care commitment to our nation's veterans.

Sincerely,

John W. Olver
Member of Congress

To sign up for my occasional e-newsletters, click [here](#) .
To stop receiving my e-newsletters, click [here](#) .